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Witham Friary.

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With an Appendix by the Rt. Rev. Bishop Hobhouse.

THERE are many places whose importance is wholly disproportionate to the special story of their buildings or the site on which they stand. They have derived it through their intimate connection with great events or personages who have become famous in the wider history of the nation.

Among such in our County of Somerset, perhaps few of the lesser known spots can claim a larger share of attention than Witham. It may be safely maintained that only to a minority of the members of this Society is it more than a name : yet a glance at the circumstances which led to the establishment of a monastery at this place, at the time when this was done, and at the men who were directly or indirectly connected with it, will bring us into contact with one of the most decisive and important epochs of English History.

The details relating to the building and endowment of the house; the boundaries of the domain, and the liberties conferred upon it; its ultimate dissolution and spoliation, have

been fully dealt with by Bishop Hobhouse, a part of whose interesting lecture delivered in 1885 is printed as an appendix to this paper. Those who require more precise particulars upon these points are referred to Eyton, Dugdale, Tanner and Sir Richard Colt Hoare, with the various authorities cited by them; but above all to the "Magna Vita Sancti Hugonis," published in the Rolls series. This paper, therefore, deals only with the historical connection of the place, and but incidentally with its archæology.

In order to form a just appreciation of the events which led to the foundation of Witham, it is necessary to go back and to sketch rapidly what had been going on in the Church during the hundred years previous to its foundation.

The people had been put under the yoke of a masterful Norman conqueror, who, though he had completely subjugated their Saxon thanes, had wholly failed to subdue the clergy.[1] Notwithstanding the countenance and assistance given to William by Popes Alexander II. and Hildebrand, notwithstanding ejection of the bishops and clergy from their offices, perhaps from resentment at these marks of conquest, a stubborn and sullen resistance had been maintained, the effects of which were made evident long after political affairs seemed to have settled down.

The new French primate, Lanfranc, ignorant of their speech, lent his master a willing hand. Even the saints of the conquered English, because their Saxon names sounded uncouth and barbarous, and would not readily Latinise or Frenchify, were struck out of the calendar.[2] Moreover, at this time, when monasticism had become triumphant everywhere, the English secular clergy, in spite of the severe laws of Edgar and Canute, still persisted in their ancient right to marry, and thus from pre-Norman days we are able to trace a feeling of separateness in the English Church, and an im-

(1) *Milman*, Latin Christianity (ed. 1872), vol. v., p. 14.
(2) *Milman*, Op. cit., p. 15.

patience of the papal yoke, on the part of the people as well as of the native priesthood, which was constantly breaking out, long before the great and final rupture of the sixteenth century.

The bestowal of the prizes of the conquered church by the Norman kings upon their own followers, upon men who were more warriors than priests, resulted in the fact that the bishops were great barons rather than prelates ; consequently the clergy became more and more arrogant as they became more and more powerful, and at last, under Stephen, the bishops boldly claimed the right to elect the king himself. These prelates being great nobles, all wearing arms, leading their retainers to battle, and mingling in the cruelties of war, it is not to be wondered at that the lower clergy were often lawless and violent men.[3]

Our own unique Bishop's Palace, although later in date than this period, is yet a living monument of those troublous times, when it was sought to maintain the sacerdotal order as a sacred caste, above the common law, and independent of the state. Such had been the outcome of the Norman policy.

The separation of the courts of justice into civil and ecclesiastical—whereas in Saxon times one court had had jurisdiction over clergy and laity alike—was another important factor in the then state of the church.

At the time when our subject rightly begins, affairs had reached such a pitch that the clergy of all ranks laid claim to an inviolable sanctity. The most heinous crimes were committed by a priest with comparative impunity, for the state had no jurisdiction ; and so far was this carried that even in a case where a layman had murdered a priest, the church claimed the right to try the culprit. Later we shall see how singularly this assumption recoiled upon the heads of the arrogant churchmen. Every priest practically possessed absolute immunity from capital punishment, because ecclesiastical courts could award no

(3) *Milman*, Op. cit., p. 20.

greater sentence than deprivation or excommunication, which could be, and often were reversed. Yet all this time the laws of the state were of the most Draconic kind, and life was taken from the common people for comparatively trivial offences. Even Stephen, the defender of the church, had to do penance for having laid impious hands on the Lord's heritage in seizing on proud bishop's castles. We in the present day can scarcely conceive to what lengths an ecclesiastical hierarchy could go, when once their power had become equal to that of the State.

It was then in times so troublous, when the schism in the church had produced an Anti-pope, with all the consequent weakness of a divided and contested authority, that events arose which led ultimately to the founding of Witham; events which threw into the shade all others, and absorbed the whole mind of Christendom.

It was the last ounce which broke down the overweighted camel; it was the inflexible attitude of Becket, the man whom Henry had himself raised up to the primacy, which led to the great strife between King and Church, a strife that may undoubtedly be termed the beginning of the Reformation.

Of the characters of Henry and of Becket, when so many, and just now so popular means of studying them are at hand,[4] it would be out of place here to enlarge.

Both were strong and able men; both were obstinate, and above all, each entertained the highest possible ideal of his own office and prerogative. When, after his preferment to the primacy, Becket began to assert that "whatever had once belonged to the Church might be recovered at any time,"[5] while the Church's courts remained the sole adjudicators in such causes; it followed that the church thus became at once plaintiff, judge, and, above all, executioner of its own judgments. The demand of the castle of Tunbridge from the

(4) *Irving's* production of Tennyson's play.
(5) *Milman* Op. Cit. vol. v. p. 41.

De Clares, which had once been church property, though it had been exchanged generations before, in the Conqueror's time for a Norman castle, seems to have brought matters to a head; and the king with his nobles, perceiving this to be a menace to the whole feudal nobility, determined to make a firm stand. They wisely rested their main contention upon the ground which would best enlist the sympathies of the common people, namely, the immunities of the clergy from all the temporal jurisdiction to which they, on the other hand, were so constantly amenable.

Proceedings were begun in 1164, by an assembly called by King Henry, first at Westminster, and afterwards at Clarendon near Salisbury, where the famous Constitutions were drawn up; to which, after much opposition on the part of Becket, he and the other bishops with a large number of nobles agreed.

It is not necessary here to follow all that happened subsequently. The great event was the tragedy of Becket's murder; the instant effect of which became evident in the public conscience. It cast a veil over all his failings; his pride and spiritual arrogance were at once forgotten; and the holiness of his private life, against which no breath of calumny had ever been raised, even in those days of blood and licence, was brought into the fullest relief. Horror at the crime was the one feeling throughout Christendom. His fortitude and calmness in the presence of his assailants, at once raised him to the rank of a Martyr for his Church; and within three or four years of his death[6] he was not only canonised, but became immediately the most popular saint in Europe, and his shrine the most famous resort of pilgrims in all the middle ages. Milman remarks,[7] "the worship of Becket, and in these days it would be difficult to discriminate between popular worship and adoration, superseded not in Canterbury alone,

(6) The murder was on Dec. 29th, 1170.

(7) Latin Christianity, vol. v. p. 22, ed. 1872.

nor in England alone, that of the Son of God, and even of His Virgin Mother."

Of the four knights who took part in Becket's murder, it is of interest to us to note that two, if not three, were Somerset men, while all four were connected with or had property in the county.

Reginald Fitzurse, of Williton, struck the first blow,[8] and his family gave part of its endowment to the Church of St. Decuman's, together with land for a manse at Williton.[9]

Richard Brito, or le Bret, of Sampford Bret, gave the last blow,[8] and his family gave the Church of St. Decuman's for a prebend in Wells Cathedral.[10]

William de Tracy,[11] who gave the first mortal wound,[8] and with whom Becket struggled before the altar and dashed on the pavement, was the third.[12] His family also endowed the church with Bovey, in Devon.

Hugh de Moreville, the fourth, was also connected with Somerset,[13] but there is scant evidence that he actually struck at all.

The desire of the various families of the assassins to make atonement is further proved by the foundation of Woodspring Priory, which was built by Courtenay, a near relative of Tracy, avowedly as an expiatory act. The house was dedicated, moreover, to St. Thomas of Canterbury.

Nothing, perhaps, shows more decisively the immense revulsion of feeling in the country which the outrage on Becket had produced against the rising tide of resistance to the arrogant assumptions of the church, than the varied and remarkable acts performed by the king himself and the families of the assassins by way of expiation. Yet, on the other hand, perhaps, no other fact so strongly proves the

(8) *Milman*, Op. cit., p. 126.
(9, 10) *Church*, Reginald Bishop of Bath, p. 23 (Archæologica).
(11) *Eyton's* Doomsday Studies, Somerset, vol. 1, p. 64.
(12) *Milman*, op. cit., p. 125.
(13) Som. Arch. & N. H. Soc. Proc., vol. xxi., p. 35.

great strength of the movement which had culminated in the famous Constitutions of Clarendon, than that the murderers themselves were not sacrificed. Later legends, indeed, "impose upon them dark and romantic acts of penance," but history shows them subsequently in high places of trust and honour.[14]

It is true Henry issued orders for their apprehension, but as seen before, the contention of Becket and his party that the murderer of a priest could only be tried by a clerical tribunal, by the irony of fate was used by his own murderers, who would naturally claim to be so tried, with the result that only ecclesiastical and not capital punishment ensued.

It is not the place here to repeat the proceedings of the legates Theodino di Porto and Albert, who nearly drove Henry into open defiance of the Pope.[15] In the end they wisely lowered their terms, and the famous reconciliation took place in the Cathedral of Avranches, May 21, 1172, where Henry swore on the Gospels that he was not responsible for Becket's murder, and where he entered into certain undertakings, more or less important as regards the subsequent history of the kingdom, but all of an expiatory character. The result was to undo much that had been accomplished in the way of remedy of abuses. The church was, so far as the king's power went, re-invested with all its previous possessions and privileges, and became thenceforth so strengthened that it was able to postpone the final disruption from the central authority for nearly four centuries. Had it not been for Becket's murder that great event would surely have dated from the reign of the second rather than of the eighth Henry.

No one can doubt the sincerity of Henry II., for though weighed down by his family troubles, and, of course, con-

(14) *Milman*, Op. cit., p. 127.
(15) *Hume*, Vol. 1, p. 88, ed. 1886.

stantly prodded with the taunt that all his misfortunes were judgments for the persecution and martyrdom of the now sainted Thomas, yet the personal penance he performed at the shrine within three years of the murder[16] seems to have been voluntary, and strong man that he was, this act shows how deeply Becket's death had changed the spirit of revolt against spiritual authority into one of almost abject personal submission.

Further evidence of the marvellous effect on public opinion caused by the martyrdom, is that Bartholomew,[17] Bishop of Exeter (1161-1184), who with Gilbert Foliot, Bishop of London,[18] had always been one of the greatest opponents of Becket and his policy, was the person above all others, selected to preach the sermon at Canterbury upon the occasion of the service for the "reconciliation" of the Cathedral from the stain of blood. Some reason for this selection may be found in the fact that when Becket had excommunicated Foliot and others, the Bishop of Exeter, though he declined to join in an appeal against the Archbishop (Becket) to the Pope, yet proved his sympathy by giving "the kiss of peace" to the then outlawed Foliot,[19] perhaps under the circumstances even a stronger act, than that which he declined.

It is of much interest now to note that notwithstanding all the concessions re-granted to the papal power, and even at the climax of its assumption, the Pope even then yielded his claim to appoint the English Bishops, and required Henry, the penitent King, to exercise his Royal right, and to fill up the sees kept vacant during his quarrel with Becket.[20]

The events here hinted at took place at a time when the disorders and open violence of the secular clergy had led men

(16) The Bull for the canonisation of St. Thomas is dated Mar. 13, 1173, less than 27 months after the murder on December 29, 1170.

(17) *Brushfield*—Address to Devon Association, 1893, p. 6.

(18) *Milman*, Op. cit. p. 37.

(19) *Milman*, Op. cit. p. 98.

(20) *Church*, Reginald, Bishop of Bath, p. 6.

more than ever to the conclusion that a religious life could only be lived by renunciation and retirement from the world; hence it was *par excellence* the age of monasticism.

Great numbers of monasteries, since become famous, were founded at this period, and it is not surprising that part of the expiatory work to be performed by Henry consisted in the undertakings to found three new religious houses in England. Two of these were satisfied by reconstruction of the Benedictine Nunnery at Ambresbury,[21] and the change of order with enlargement at Waltham, Essex, from secular to regular Canons of St. Augustine.[22] The third was the subject of this paper.

It may be well supposed that the King, suffering as he had, from a proud and exacting clergy, depressed in spirits by his own difficulties and disappointments, would feel a desire for some sterner and more ascetic practice than had hitherto been the custom of the Benedictines or Augustine Canons. He seems then to have determined to plant in England the strictest and most austere of all the Orders—the Carthusians; which had existed about one hundred years, at the Grande Chartreuse, founded in 1081, by St. Bruno, of Cologne, the fame of whose special sanctity had spread over Europe. For many reasons the rule would be likely to commend itself to Henry. Their three great precepts were silence, solitude and prayer. Their houses were specially constructed, so that each brother was practically a hermit, though living in communities; each having separate cells, usually one for day, and one for night.

They had no common refectory or great dormitory. They might not enter each other's cells except by leave of the Prior. Their church was in the centre, with the cells opening into the great cloisters surrounding it. They had a second house and church for the lay brethren attached to the convent, yet

(21) *Church*, Bp. Reginald, Op. cit. p. 8.
(22) Bp. Tanner, p. 119.

separate from it. The entire system may be described as solitary confinement on bread and water, literally so on Fridays. Their heads were not merely tonsured but completely shaven. They were forbidden to wear linen; one garment only of coarse woollen was allowed. Flesh was entirely eschewed, and there was a peculiar small door in the corner of each cell, so contrived that food could be handed to the occupant by a serving brother without either of them seeing the other. They could only leave the house by special leave on urgent occasions, and perfect silence was to be kept by all, except at certain hours, when "conversations" upon the rules of the order, or prescribed religious subjects, were alone permitted. Their habit was entirely white, or as nearly so as their other habits permitted. Strange to say, this most severe of orders is the only one which has at all consistently observed its rule, and remains to this day practically unchanged in ideal, though it has long since relaxed its practice of having two separate establishments.

Such an order would be attractive to Henry, not alone as suitable to his mental depression, but as likely to give him no political trouble, and perhaps to prove as a useful example. Moreover, between his penance in 1174 and 1181, when he is said to have founded Witham,[23] Henry had had time for reflection, and he may have thought so quiet and self-denying a brotherhood would require little in the way of means. Doubtless, too, he had by this time felt the smart of the undertakings he had given, and the pressure of his wars. In any case he provided a site for his new foundation suitable to the

(23) There is great discrepancy as to the date of the foundation of Witham. Dugdale puts it at 1181, and in this he is followed by Sir R. C. Hoare, Bishop Hobhouse (*see* appendix), and many others. On the other hand in Vita S. Hugonis, Rolls Ser., p. xxii., it is said the date of St. Hugh's arrival cannot have been later than 1176, so that the monastery must have been founded at latest in 1175. This view is adopted by Canon Church (*see* Reginald, pp. 8, 9), and, seeing that St. Hugh was consecrated Bishop of Lincoln in 1186, after eleven years' residence at Witham, it follows that the foundation was in 1175 or before.

ideal of its order—a veritable forest wilderness, as described by Bishop Hobhouse (*see* appendix).

Thus far we have sketched in the merest outline the circumstances which led to the foundation of Witham, and a suggestion of the reasons for the introduction of the Carthusians, who were thus first planted in England here in Somerset. We have now to trace its subsequent history, and the causes which have made it memorable, not *per se*, but through its connection with the great, if not the greatest, event in English mediæval church history—the murder and canonisation of St. Thomas of Canterbury.

Witham[24] Priory, commonly called Friary, was dedicated to the honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. John Baptist and all Saints ;[25] but the King was so niggardly of endowment, for there seems to have been none at all beyond the five thousand odd acres of wilderness, that the first Prior sent over with the brethren gave it up in despair and returned to Dauphiné. The second died soon after his arrival; and there seems to be no record of their names or of anything beyond their failure.

It is said by Dugdale and repeated by Tanner upon the authority of Leland, that there was a nunnery at Witham previous to the coming of the disciples of St. Bruno. Leland in his *Collectanea*, vol. i., p. 84 (ed. 1770), merely says :—"Henricus 2s fundator domus [quære Hen. 3 fundator per Camd.] Primum cœnobium monalium, quod postea fuit primum monasterium Carthusianarum in Anglia."

Here it may be remarked that although another Carthusian house was soon founded in our county at Hinton in the Mendips, yet the order never became thoroughly popular in England; and, including the two houses in Somerset, there

(24) On the name Witham, it is curious to note the antiquity of place-name etymology, for the old thirteenth century chronicler says the word had been given by a species of prophetic instinct : that it is Wit-ham, the home of wisdom. See *Vita S. Hugonis*, R S. p. 67.

(25) *Dugdale.* On Dedications, see remarks in *Notes on Wellington*, p. 25, and *Canonsleigh*, p. 11.

never were more than nine in all England, viz.:—Witham and Hinton in Somerset; Charterhouse, London; Epworth, Lincolnshire; Shene, Surrey; Mountgrace, Yorkshire; Beauvale, Notts; St. Anne, Coventry; and Kingston-upon-Hull. Of these, only the six first named were in existence at the time of the dissolution. Moreover, there have been very few Carthusian nunneries anywhere, and there was never one in England.[25a]

At the recent meeting on the spot it was stated by Mr. Buckle, and at the previous meeting of the Society in 1878 by Mr. Hunt (*see* vol. xxiv, p. 21), that the present building had been the parish church of Witham before the arrival of the Carthusians, and that the work performed by Hugh of Avalon (of whom more anon) was by way of casing to the walls, to enable them to bear the vaulted roof which he erected; but it is contended that whatever building may have stood here previously, it could not have been a parish church in Hugh's day. That a religious establishment did exist at Witham, and possibly on the present site, is confirmed by many authorities; the only uncertainty is whether "cœnobium monalium" may without question be translated nunnery, as rendered by Dugdale and others. The present building may perhaps be the chapel of the earlier recluses, whether male or female; though that is rather contradicted by the statement of Mr. Dimock, in the preface to the Magna Vita, that on Hugh's arrival, no sites, whether of convent or churches, had even been marked out.[25b] Supposing then this to be the chapel

(25a) In the Louvre are twenty-two pictures by Le Sueur, painted in 1649 for the Chartreuse at Paris, portraying incidents in the life of S. Bruno. The same subjects have also been treated by the great painter of the Carthusians in Spain, Zurbaran. Much of interest relating to them may be found in *Mrs. Jameson's* "Legends of the Monastic Orders," pp. 124 et. sq.

(25b) "Neque enim diffinitum erat usque adhuc, ubi major, ubi minor ecclesia, illa monachorum cellis et claustris hœc cum fratrum domunculis et hospitum diversoriis, aptius construi debuisset." *Magna Vita S. Hugonis*, Lib. ii., cap. v., p. 67.

of an earlier convent, that alone would prove that it could not have been a parish church.

At that date, parish churches were few and far between. Manors had but recently grown into parishes, and if the peasantry had then been so numerous as to have required such a new thing as a parish church in the desert wilderness which Witham is described to have been, it is most improbable that they could have been removed in a body from the manor, as we are told[25c] they were, merely to create a true solitude for the monks. But the very conclusive fact that there had been no burial ground and no font down to so late a date as 1459 should convince any candid mind that at that time there had been no parish church. In consequence of the monks having somewhat relaxed their rule, and having permitted a resettlement of the laity for cultivation of their manor, they petitioned for leave to erect a font. On May 29, 1459, the Bishop of Bath and Wells granted a licence to the Priory for a baptismal font to be erected "in capella de le Frery," with directions to William of Sidon, Suffragan, to dedicate a churchyard.[26] This then may be taken as the date of the first erection of Witham into a parish, and the present font being by tradition the same as then erected proves that the present parish church is the "capella de le Frery," or the inferior church built by Hugh according to Carthusian custom for the *fratres conversi* or lay brethren.[26a]

We shall see that it is mere confusion to speak of the whole establishment of Witham as a Friary, simply from the fact that its serving brethren were called *le Frery*.[27] The place is

(25c) *Magna Vita S. Hugonis*, p. 68.

(26) Dugdale quotes Harl. MS. 6,966, fo. 91.

(26a) This is confirmed by Dimock. Pref. to *Magna Vita*, *p.* xxiii.

(27) Since this paper was written, the Rev. Henry Gee writes that "Friary is a case of false analogy started in days when the old meaning of Fraterium had passed out of recollection."

now known as Witham Friary, and even Bishop Hobhouse[27] uses this name more than once; but no sort of authority for this can be found, nor can it be ascertained when first it was so called.

The Carthusians were essentially monks belonging to the older orders. They were Benedictines who had adopted the severe rule of St. Bruno. The Carthusian monk was the typical recluse whose idea was that to save his own soul by leading a holy life he must absolutely retire from all intercourse with the wicked world into some such remote and desert place as the forest of Selwood. It was not till after the foundation of Witham that the selfishness of pursuing their own salvation, while leaving all their fellow creatures to the care of the secular priesthood, became apparent; a priesthood, moreover, as we have seen, anything but saintly. We have hinted at the condition of the secular clergy; their violence, their lawlessness, their licence naturally brought about a a reaction and a desire for better things, which resulted in the formation of new orders by St. Dominic and St. Francis, whose lives were to be devoted not to seclusion but to going out into the world and ministering to mankind. These new orders alone were friars, and their coming was just as distasteful to the previous orders of clergy, whether regular or secular, as is now the ministration of an intruder in a modern parish. They assumed the task of visiting the sick, of preaching in parish churches wherever permitted, and especially at markets and fairs, or wherever men most congregated. So very strict a body as the Carthusians could not fail to feel angry and jealous at the new orders; the hostility between monks and

(27a) Bishop Hobhouse writes: "In the seventeenth century contemporary correspondence shows that 'The Frary' was the current name. . . . . In my boyhood there was no other name *in ore hominum* but Vrary." Precisely so, and hence the impropriety of the learned and the map-makers, who, by improving on the despised vernacular by the insertion of an *i* to make the word sound properly, and like the well-known name of something totally different. have produced much confusion, and a conspicuous example of historical inaccuracy.

friars was so acute that the last thing the Witham brethren would have called themselves would be by the hateful name of friars. The organization of the two bodies was totally distinct and different: while monks of the old orders resided in a separate house, each with its own separate rules, independent of all others, and governed solely by its own abbot, subject only to the general rule of the order; the friars of each order were subject to one great central authority, a system which in the end led to great abuses and much disorder. Whereas the monasteries were mostly placed in retired spots away from the wicked world, the friaries were always in the suburbs of great towns, from which preachers went forth singly without purse and without scrip. These were the true mendicant orders, whose vows, though including much in common with those of monks, were wholly different in object and in practice. When, later, the friars in their turn relapsed from their vows and became scandalous, there arose another, and this time a schismatic sect of preachers, the Lollards.

In Somerset the friars had three houses only, viz., that of the Dominicans at Ilchester, the Franciscans at Bridgwater, and the Augustines at Bristol. The Austin Friars must on no account be confounded with the Canons of St. Augustine,[28] but were a new order adopting the looser rule of the older Augustines. From their habit the Dominicans were called the Black Friars, the Franciscans Grey, and the Carmelites the White Friars. The Austins also wore black, and the Crutched Friars blue. The latter were an offshoot of the Trinitarians, whose proper habit was white. They, however, adopted a partly blue habit, on which was a cross, or *crutch*, in red, on breast and back—hence their name.[29]

From the fact that very few monks were ordained priests, they were severally known as *frater*, not *pater*. The same

(28) *See* Canonsleigh, pp. 5, et sq.—Dev. Assoc., vol. xxiv., p. 364.

(29) See *Mrs. Jameson*, Legends of the Monastic Orders, p. xxxi., also *Cutts'* Dictionary of the Church of England, S.P.C.K.

may be said of the friars. St. Francis himself was never a priest, and consequently never said Mass, or communicated the viaticum to the dying. It is then by mere confusion of the orders that all regular clergy have been conventionally called friars in these latter days, even by so careful and precise a writer as Bishop Hobhouse. It would be of much interest to ascertain the first use of the term Witham Friary. It will probably be found to occur in moderately recent times, *i.e.*, long since the Dissolution, and that the term Friary does not belong to, and ought not to be applied to Witham. It was always Prioratus de Witham in official documents.

Sir R. C. Hoare's account of this monastery is most unsatisfactory and disappointing. It is "but one halfpennyworth of bread to this intolerable deal of sack;" for by far the largest part does not concern the Priory at all, but only the pedigrees of the families who have possessed the property since the spoliation, who have destroyed the monastic buildings, as at Canonsleigh, to provide materials for a modern manor house. This latter has also been pulled down by the owner, Beckford, in the last century.

We are not here concerned with Witham in its fall and debasement, but with its life and time of prosperity, about which very little indeed is to be learnt from Hoare.

We have tried to show the reasons which led Henry to bring over the Carthusians, and how at first the scheme failed. He then ordered Reginald, Bishop of Bath, who had gone to Rome on his business, and who, on his return, was actually consecrated at St. Jean de Maurienne, in the neighbourhood of the Grand Chartreuse, to petition that Hugh of Avalon (in Burgundy) might be sent over from that house to take charge of the new foundation. On Hugh's arrival he found the two or three monks, left by their deserting and dead priors, living in wooden sheds, and that none of the buildings had

been begun, or, as we have seen, even marked out.[30]

The character of the famous new prior is shown by his having gone straight to Witham and not to court, whither, indeed, he did not go until he had failed to obtain funds from the king, and was consequently obliged to make a personal appeal. But once there, his presence seems to have acted like magic upon Henry, for he at once obtained all he wanted; so much so, that the building of the upper house for a prior and twelve brethren with their church, and a lower house and church for the lay brethren, or *fratres conversi*, were completed in eleven years.[31] Not only was the monastery finished, but the fame of the piety and austerity of the newly arrived order, especially that of their prior, had spread far and wide.

In 1186 the Bishopric of Lincoln had been vacant for a year and a half, and at a council held at Eynsham the election of a new bishop was taken in hand. Both the King and Baldwin, Archbishop of Canterbury, had determined that Hugh, prior of Witham, should be the man; but the council derided the idea of promoting a savage monk from the backwoods to be their bishop, and the Lincoln canons were horrified when they found the masterful Henry was in earnest. In the end they yielded and accepted Hugh, who at first declined to leave his solitude, and pleaded that the election was invalid on the ground that it could only take place in the chapter of the Cathedral. In fact he obstinately refused until he received the commands of the Superior of his Order at the Grand Chartreuse, and was compelled to obey. His insistance on regularity of election seems to have pleased the canons, who had at first so strongly objected, and they regularly elected him. He was consecrated at Westminster on St. Matthew's Day, September

(30) For a full account of his life before coming to England, see *Magna Vita S. Hugonis*, in Rolls Series. Also a more popular account taken from this in *Cutts'* Dictionary of the Church of England, S.P.C.K.

(31) Is it not possible that the casing of the present walls may have been added by Hugh to his own earlier building, by way of completion to a slighter one erected when funds were scanty?

21, 1186, by Baldwin, the primate. He set out immediately to his new home, amidst much pomp and many retainers provided by the King. He himself sat on a mule, with all his worldly goods tied in a bundle behind him. It is said that his followers, mortified at the mean appearance of the bishop, cut away his bundle unknown to him. He reached Lincoln on the eighth day, and entered his Cathedral by the west door, walking barefoot, and in his monk's habit. His life at Lincoln was but the continuation of that at Witham. "He brought with him all his Carthusian simple devotedness to God's service, all the Carthusian contempt for the things of the world." Nor did he neglect his priory for his bishopric. He used to visit Witham once or twice a year from Lincoln, a very serious matter in those days, and no doubt looked well after the brethren he had been constrained to leave.[32] Sometimes he stayed at Witham a month or two at a time.[33] He also made several journeys to his earlier home at the Grande Chartreuse, and it is recorded[34] that on one occasion he strongly rebuked the brethren there for asking on his arrival—"What news?"

His influence was quickly felt, not only in his diocese of Lincoln, but throughout the country. He stands alone among the bishops of that day as the one man sure to follow the straight path of duty, sternly regardless of consequences, yet withal cool in judgment, wise and clearly perceiving the right path to take, from which no influence, either of fear or desire, could turn him aside. Notwithstanding his constant wish to be relieved from his cares, for which he sent repeated prayers to the Holy See, it is evident that Henry, with all his impatience and wilfulness, stood in awe of the inflexible bishop. Upon one occasion the king, on being refused a prebend which he had demanded for a courtier, sent for him

(32) See *Vita S. Hugonis, R.S., p.* 193.

(33) *Op. cit., p.* 217.

(34) *Alban Butler*--Lives of the Saints.

and reminded him of all his benefits, upbraiding him for his ingratitude. Hugh undaunted, and with sweet countenance, meekly replied that he could regard the service of God alone.

Moreover, with all his austerities, he was yet joyous and full of talk and fun.

His unselfish yet gallant fight on behalf of the weak against the mighty, his love and care for the poor and the oppressed, combined with his judgment and tact in dealing with men, mark him out in an age of violence as a true and saintly Christian bishop, who, though not a native, may yet be truly ranked as one of England's noblest worthies. It has been well said that "few men deserve a higher and a holier niche" than Hugh, Prior of Witham and Bishop of Lincoln.

It was the sterling character and earnest zeal of Hugh which carried on the real work of the Church, so seriously thrown back by the death of Becket; it was the holiness of his life which helped to raise after his death the national protest against both papal aggression and royal subserviency, which may be said to have re-enacted the Clarendon Constitutions in the more famous document called the Magna Charta; and thus it is that Hugh has left so deep a mark upon the English Church that Witham, insignificant in itself, becomes a spot remarkable as the first home among us of a really great man.

Whether Witham as a building could compare in beauty with Lincoln cannot now be decided; but one of the noblest of our cathedrals testifies that the once obscure monk of Grenoble was not only admirable in his life and character, but had the true artistic taste, which makes him stand out as one of the greatest church builders of the middle ages, of the particular time when art seems to have reached its climax, and to have left us examples which no subsequent period has been able to approach.

No adulation, no prosperity, no contact with the world could sully the purity of his noble humility: his affection still clung to his beloved *alma mater* in Dauphiné, and after attend-

ing King John in London during the summer of 1200, he set out again to visit his old home. Returning to England after a short stay, he was taken ill in London, and died November 16, 1200. He was buried with the greatest magnificence at Lincoln.[34] The king, who was then staying there, took part, in the funeral, together with William, King of Scotland, three archbishops, fourteen bishops, and over one hundred abbots, besides a great number of nobles. His holiness of life and greatness of character were felt more than ever when he was gone. In twenty years after his death he too was canonized by Honorius III, and his body transferred to a splendid shrine behind the high altar; and thus Lincoln in the north soon became a place of pilgrimage almost rivalling Canterbury in the south. Sixty years later his body was again transferred to a new and still grander shrine of gold, in the presence of Edward I. and his queen.

Who then shall deny the interest attaching to Witham? It stands as a mark connecting events of the highest importance in our national history: it should ever remind us of its intimate association with two of the greatest figures in the history of the English Church; for of all the men who have lived and died in England the two most famous of British saints are unquestionably St. Thomas of Canterbury and St. Hugh of Lincoln.

(34) *Alban Butler's* Lives of the Saints.